

The Patent Examiner has rejected claims 2 and 4 to 6 as being unpatentable over various combinations of *Tamatsuka* (874) in view of *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeldt* and *Kim* and *Tamatsuka* (982) and *Tamatsuka* (668). On Page 2 of the Office Action, the Patent Examiner has newly cited the *Streetman* reference.

On Page 4 of the Office Action, the Patent Examiner has contended that "*Tamatsuka et al* do not necessary teach the single crystal to be pulled under a hydrogen partial pressure of less than 3 mbar. However, *Tamatsuka et al* do disclose a partial hydrogen pressure of about 1/3 that of argon (cf.column 6, lines 50-51), while a partial pressure of argon of about 10 mbar is standard in the art."

This contention is respectfully traversed.

On page 5 of the Office Action, the Patent Examiner has contended that "the further limitation of claim 5 is thus not necessarily fulfilled by *Tamatsuka et al*, nor by *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeldt et al*. However Applicant does not explain why the range for the hydrogen content of the argon-hydrogen atmosphere as defined by claim 5 is critical to his invention."

This contention is respectfully traversed.

The present invention is directed to a method for producing a silicon semiconductor wafer comprising pulling a silicon single crystal from a melt, in the presence of hydrogen, using the Czochralski method, wherein the silicon single crystal is pulled under a hydrogen partial pressure of less than 3 mbar; doping the silicon single crystal with nitrogen and producing a nitrogen concentration of $5 \cdot 10^{12} \text{ atcm}^{-3}$ to $5 \cdot 10^{15} \text{ atcm}^{-3}$; and separating the silicon semiconductor wafer from the silicon single crystal.

Therefore the present invention relates to the production of a semiconductor wafer which is separated from a silicon single crystal grown according to the Czochralski method. An object of the invention is to provide a method which a) prevents aggregates of vacancies from building up an inner coating of silicon dioxide and b) to ensure that the aggregates of vacancies remain small. If the conditions a) and b) are met, the aggregates can be eliminated during a subsequent annealing step. The claimed method comprises pulling a single crystal according to the CZ-method under a hydrogen partial pressure of less than 3 mbar and doping the silicon single crystal with nitrogen. A nitrogen concentration of $5 \cdot 10^{12}$ to $5 \cdot 10^{15} \text{ atcm}^{-3}$ is thereby established.

Hence the present invention has the advantages that the claimed method prevents aggregates of vacancies from building up an inner coating of silicon dioxide and ensures that the aggregates of vacancies remain small. In order to prevent an inner coating of the aggregates with silicon dioxide it is claimed to pull the silicon single crystal according to the CZ-method under a hydrogen partial pressure of less than 3 mbar. In addition, the silicon single crystal is doped with nitrogen having a concentration of from $5 \cdot 10^{12}$ to $5 \cdot 10^{15}$ atcm⁻³ in order to generate small aggregates, only.

Tamatsuka et al. (874) teach in column 6, in lines 47-51 that the wafers doped with nitrogen were subjected to a heat treatment at 1200° C for 30 seconds to out-diffuse nitrogen or oxygen present, in the wafer surface portion. As the atmosphere gas around the wafers, a mixed gas atmosphere of 75% argon and 25% hydrogen was used.

It should be evident that this teaching is completely different from the claimed invention as recited in claim 2 of the present application which relates to the preparation of semiconductor wafers by pulling a silicon single crystal and

separating wafers from this single crystal. Whereas *Tamatsuka et al* disclose a specific atmosphere in the environment for the heat treatment of wafers, the present invention recited in claim 2 refers to a specific atmosphere during the pulling of a single crystal, i.e. during a stage of manufacture where wafers do not yet exist.

Therefore, the Examiner's contention that *Tamatsuka et al.* provides a motivation to be combined with *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeld et al.* is traversed. This is because the *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeld* reference teaches an atmosphere of pure argon during the pulling of the single crystal.

Besides, in contrast to *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeld* which proposes an argon ambient pressure of 10 mbar, an argon pressure of at least 80 mbar is needed in the case of hydrogen doping in order to stay below the critical partial pressure of 3 mbar for H_2 and, at the same time, to avoid an explosion hazard. 10mbar ambient pressure would mean that 30% of the ambient consists of H_2 to achieve 3 mbar partial H_2 pressure!

It is respectfully pointed out that an object of the invention as recited in claim 2 is to provide a method which (a) prevents aggregates of vacancies from building up an inner coating of silicon dioxide and (b) to ensure that the aggregates of vacancies remain small. The cited references do not recognize at all this problem and do not teach the claimed solution to this problem.

Tamatsuka et al. (US Patent No. 6,291,874) disclose a method for producing a silicon single crystal wafer wherein the size of so-called crystal originated particles (COP) is decreased by doping the silicon crystal with nitrogen during the pulling of the crystal according to the Czochralski method. It is theorized that the above mentioned aggregated vacancies are responsible for the formation of COP. Nevertheless, the Office Action argument that the reference discloses the teaching of pulling the single crystal in an atmosphere having a specific partial pressure of hydrogen is respectfully traversed as believed to be in error. Nowhere in this reference is there any statement about an atmosphere whatsoever which has to be established during the pulling of the silicon single crystal. Thus the reference completely fails to teach or to suggest the claimed invention.

Also this reference fails to teach how to prevent the formation of an inner coating of the aggregates with silicon dioxide by providing a specific hydrogen partial pressure during the pulling of the crystal.

Tamatsuka et al. (874) further disclose a process step during which nitrogen is out-diffused in the wafer surface portion, (please see column 6, lines 47-51). This step is performed in a mixed gas atmosphere of 75% argon and 25% hydrogen after the wafers have been cut from the silicon single crystal. However, according to the present invention it is necessary to keep the hydrogen partial pressure in the claimed range during the pulling of the single crystal. This is because the aggregates and the inner coating of the aggregates with silicon dioxide form during this pulling period and can not be significantly influenced later after the wafers have already been cut from the single crystal. It is respectfully submitted that the Office Action has completely overlooked this essential difference between the present invention (hydrogen partial pressure during crystal pulling) and the *Tamatsuka et al.* reference (wafer cutting later from crystal).

Accordingly, it is also improper to combine information disclosed in *Tamatsuka et al.* (874) which concerns the atmosphere during an out-diffusing procedure to which wafers are subjected with information disclosed in *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeld et al.* (US Patent No. 4,330,361) which concerns the atmosphere during the pulling of a single crystal. Moreover, *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeld et al* teach the use of a pure argon atmosphere during the pulling of the crystal and therefore clearly lead away from the second feature of the claimed method, i.e. an atmosphere containing hydrogen with a hydrogen partial pressure of less than 3 mbar.

On page 5 of the Office Action, the Patent Examiner has contended that applicant does not explain why the range for the hydrogen content of the argon-hydrogen atmosphere as defined by claim 5 is critical to the invention. In answer to this contention, it is pointed out that the claimed invention (a) prevents aggregates of vacancies from building up an inner coating of silicon dioxide and (b) ensures that the aggregates of vacancies remain small.

The deficiencies in the teachings of the primary references to *Tamatsuka et al* (6,291,874) and *Kuhn-Kuhnenfeldt et al* (4,330,361), are not overcome by the teachings of the secondary

references which are the U.S. Patent No. 5,942,032 (to Kim), U.S. Patent No. 6,299,982 (to Tamatsuka) and U.S. Patent No. 6,224,668 (to Tamatsuka), and Streetman.

The Kim U.S. Patent No. 5,942,032 in column 10 in lines 15 to 35 discloses a method of growing vacancy rich single crystals comprising the steps of: lowering a seed crystal into contact with a melt of molten semiconductor source material in a crucible of a crystal puller; raising the seed crystal from the melt so that semiconductor material from the melt freezes on the seed crystal to form a single crystal; directing heat radiated from the side walls of the crucible to a region adjacent the surface of the melt and located below the top of the crucible for inhibiting a high instantaneous axial thermal gradient in the single crystal in the region, whereby the single crystal has no vacancy/self-interstitial boundary ring or oxidation induced stacking fault ring; thermally shielding the single crystal at a location above the melt surface to slow cooling of the crystal in the range of approximately 1150°C to 1000°C. Thus the single crystal has a predominance of vacancy defects and of agglomerated vacancy defects. Thus Kim fails to teach or to suggest the claimed invention.

The *Tamatsuka* U.S. Patent No. 6,299,982 in column 5 in lines 36 to 48 discloses that it is important to grow the crystal at a high rate of cooling from 1150 to 1080° C. at 2.3°C./min or more. In order to actually fulfill such a condition, there can be provided an apparatus for cooling the crystal in any rate of cooling from 1150°C to 1080°C in a chamber of an apparatus for producing a silicon single crystal by CZ method. Such an apparatus may be an apparatus which cools crystal by spraying a cooling gas thereto, or a water cooled ring which is provided so as to surround a crystal at a predetermined position above the melt. In this case, the cooling rate can be controlled in a desired range by controlling the pulling rate of the crystal.

Thus this *Tamatsuka* reference fails to teach or to suggest the claimed invention.

The *Tamatsuka* U.S. Patent No. 6,224,668 in column 11 in lines 1 to 5 discloses that SOI (silicon on insulator) substrates (doped with nitrogen), were subject to a heat treatment at 1200°C for 10 seconds in an atmosphere of 100% hydrogen using a lamp heater (Steag Microtech International Corporation, SHS-2800).

Thus, a 100% hydrogen atmosphere for a silicon on insulator (SOI) substrate does not suggest the hydrogen partial pressure atmosphere of less than 3 mbar of the invention for a silicon single crystal being pulled from a melt using CZ-method.

Streetman does not teach using the claimed atmosphere during the CZ-method wherein the hydrogen partial pressure is less than 3 mbar.

These prior art references fail to recognize the prior art problems described in the present Specification, and fail to suggest the claimed solution to this problem as recited by all the claims.

The present Specification on pages 3, 4 and 6 discussed this problem and provides the solution to this problem, as follows.

Although vacancy defects continue to arise in the single crystal and the semiconductor wafers separated therefrom when the prior art method is used, the formation of cavities, as have been described by *E. Iino et al.*, is not observed when the invention method is used. A hydrogen partial pressure of less than 3 mbar is particularly preferred. The partial pressure should be kept as

constant as possible while the single crystal is being pulled, so that hydrogen is uniformly incorporated in the growing single crystal in the desired concentration. It should be taken into account that some of the hydrogen is driven out of the melt.

If the silicon single crystal is doped with hydrogen in the proposed concentration, the hydrogen, together with the vacancies, becomes supersaturated when the growing crystal is cooled. While the vacancies aggregate to form voids (microcavities), the hydrogen enters the voids which form or have formed. It is important that the hydrogen concentration be selected to be sufficiently low for the supersaturation which occurs. Thus the supersaturation is sufficient only for the hydrogen to be incorporated within the voids, without separate hydrogen precipitates being formed. The optimum hydrogen concentration depends on the cooling rate of the growing crystal.

During further cooling, the hydrogen in the voids prevents the oxygen, which is likewise in a supersaturated concentration, from being able to oxidize the internal surfaces of the voids. Therefore, there is no layer of oxide formed, which otherwise is a significant factor in delaying the elimination of the voids by the heat treatment of the semiconductor wafer obtained from the

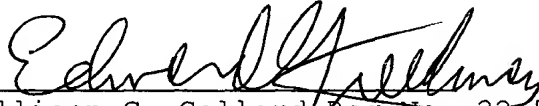
silicon single crystal. A heat treatment of the semiconductor wafer may occur; however the atmosphere must contain at most only 3% hydrogen. This heat treatment is therefore sufficient to eliminate the vacancy defects in the region of the semiconductor material in which electronic components are provided.

Furthermore, it is advantageous for the volume of the vacancy defects to be kept as low as possible, so that they can subsequently be eliminated again relatively easily. This is preferably achieved by the silicon single crystal, during pulling, additionally being doped with nitrogen and subjected to forced cooling. A suitable nitrogen concentration is between 5×10^{12} and 5×10^{15} atoms cm^{-3} . The nitrogen concentration is preferably selected between 1×10^{14} and 1×10^{15} atoms cm^{-3} . Suitable dopants are NH_3 or silicon nitride. The silicon nitride is preferably fed to the silicon melt in powder form or as a nitride-coated silicon wafer.

The above information was discussed during the Personal Interview on March 18, 2003. This resulted in the Interview Summary statement that the present claims distinguish over the prior art of record.

For all these reasons, the present invention, and all the claims, are firmly believed to be patentable under 35 U.S.C. 103 over all the prior art applied by the Patent Examiner. A prompt notification of allowability is respectfully requested.

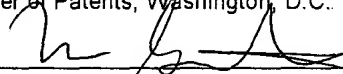
Respectfully submitted,
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Enclosure: Copy Petition for One Month Extension of Time

I hereby certify that this correspondence is being deposited with the U.S. Postal Service as first class mail in an envelope addressed to: Assistant Commissioner of Patents, Washington, D.C. 20231, on April 3, 2003.


Maria Guastella